

Parshat Pinchas – Big Rocks (First Shabbat in Annapolis)

Shabbat Shalom

Intro - Karate Story

- My mom always knew I was going to be a Rabbi
- b/c when I was 8, I had a lot of energy and I was attending a Jewish Day School until 4pm each afternoon
- So, she signed me up for Karate lessons and the instructor said to the class / the first thing you have to do is bow down / as a sign of respect
- I said / I don't bow down for anyone but God and I was kicked out of Karate class
- While my mom was proud of my strong Jewish identity.
- She was disappointed that the 8 lessons she had signed up for were non-refundable.

The Big Rocks of Life

- My mom has had a huge influence on my life
- I remember growing that she was a professor of education at Michigan State and her work was very important to her.

I was sick

- Usually when I was sick, she was able to find a babysitter. (b/c she didn't want to cancel class)
- One time when I was 10 years old, I had a bad cold --nothing serious and she couldn't find a babysitter
- It was the first class of the winter semester and she didn't want to cancel it so she took me with her.
And I'll never forget the lesson I learned from my mom that day.

Practicum: Steven Covey

- She began her class with a wonderful visual illustration that she had learned from the great business mind Steven Covey.
- She pulled out a jar and set it on the table in front of her.
- The she took out a bunch of medium sized rocks and placed them in the jar until it was full
- When no more rocks would fit inside,
- She asked the class, 'Is the jar full?' // Everyone said, 'Yes.'

Gravel

- My mom took out a bucket of gravel.
- Then she dumped it in and shook the jar
- The Gravel funneled its way in btw the spaces
- She smiled and asked – ‘Is the jar full?’
- The class had caught onto her and said no.
- She said – you’re right

Sand and Water

- She reached under the table and poured in some sand
- That went in the spaces btw the rocks and gravel.
- Again, she asked - ‘Is the jar full?’
- ‘No!’
- Finally, she poured in some water – to the lid.

What is the point of the illustration?

- Then she looked up at the class and asked, "What’s the point of this illustration?"
- One student raised his hand and said,
- "The point is / there’s always room for more -- than you think.

Mom’s Response

- She said no / that’s not the point I’m trying to make.
- The point is:
If you don’t put the big rocks in first / you won’t get them in at all."

Prioritize

- That life-lesson / has stuck with me till this day.
- That you need to prioritize what’s important to you.
- B/c it’s easy to let our time get taken over /
a) by errands b) and the newest Netflix show we want to binge-watch
--often at the expense of family and personal moments.

Big Rocks

- You have to consistently make sure / that the big rocks,
- (family, faith, community)
- The most important aspects of your life / are not pushed aside
- By all the extraneous demands / on your time.
- B/c if you don’t put them in first / you might not --get them in at all.

Synagogue's Big Rocks

- This principle of putting your big rocks first / applies not just to individuals / but to synagogues as well.
- **I believe there are 4 big rocks / that need to be the foundation of every synagogue.**

Big Rocks

- 3 of these big rocks / can be found in the Mishnah
- It says in Pirke Avot: that the world rests on 3 things
- **1) Torah, 2) Avodah and 3) Gemilut Chasadim**
1) **Torah study / 2) Service of God / 3) Acts of Loving-Kindness**
- These are the big rocks of the Jewish tradition – going back 3,000 years.
- The 4th big rock / which I'll talk about at the end of this sermon is the importance of building sacred community.

Synagogues Visited

- Now, let me say that Julie and I traveled the country this winter visiting synagogues / (and every synagogue is different)
- One of them was in dire straits / and they said Rabbi: 'we need you to be our savior.'
- 1) No one comes to services / 2) our Hebrew school is falling apart / 3) Our membership is declining.

Kol Shalom: Big Rocks in place

- But one thing / that struck Julie and I about Kol Shalom
- Is that this is a congregation that has its big rocks in place.
- 1a) This is a community that's committed to Adult Ed
- 1b) We have a strong Hebrew school // and a Preschool that keeps growing.
- 2) A dedicated core of minyanaires that come to services every week
- 3) and numerous individuals that participate in acts of lovingkindness

Credit

- Now, you have to give credit where credit is due.
- I think the stability and success of Kol Shalom /
- Is due in large part to the tremendous leadership of Rabbi Pohl / a man of great learning and wisdom.
- The dedication of a) our President Howard Salob b) the synagogue board c) and all the other great leaders who've worked so hard to cultivate a synagogue that's caring and committed to Jewish life.

No One is Perfect

- Does this mean that everything's perfect?
- That we don't need to make changes
- Of course not (if it was it would be the first synagogue in the history of the world)
- Like every organization / Kol Shalom is striving to be better
- In a society / that's more tech savvy and secular than ever before.
- As I said during my interview in February,
- Younger Jews are less connected to religious institutions and we need to work harder to show them that synagogues add value to their lives.

Ideas

- I have a lot ideas // for those 3 big rocks of:
Torah, Avodah and Gemilut Chasadim.

For example:

- 1) a) Torah and Tabloids b) Torah on Tap c) Israel Advocacy
d) begin Hebrew School with Havdalah (camp feel)
- 2a) More music on Friday night /
b) more services geared towards young families
- 3) Community service that impacts the local community
That's something that's really important to me / as I share my vision with you

Not Bill Belichick

- I'm not going to come in here like Bill Belichick and tell everyone this is how we're doing things / it's either my way or the highway
- that's not my leadership style.

Kol Shalom Community is Democratic

- The Kol Shalom community is extremely democratic.
- For example: It's my understanding / that at the board meeting in June to determine if we were going to have joint HH services with KI,
- Every single member who wanted to speak got an opportunity (every voice is valued).

Emulate Joshua

- That principle is important to me

- That's why I'll try to emulate the leadership style of the great biblical figure Joshua
- B/c Joshua was a consensus builder / who led in a different way than his predecessor Moses did.

Moses

- Moses = justice -- stood up to Pharaoh
- Law giver = brought the Torah down from Sinai but as Moses got older / the needs of the Jewish community changed.
- They're getting ready to conquer the land of Israel. and Moses asked God in this week's Torah portion //
- 'Please appoint a new leader over these people so that they won't be led astray.'

Pinchas a Possibility?

- You might assume / the next leader would be Pinchas,
- The zealous priest who jumps into action / to defend God's honor when he sees the tabernacle being defiled.
- Rashi says no!
- Pinchas' actions while admirable / revealed his inclination for quick and thoughtless leadership.
- He took matters into his own hands / w/o consulting Moses.

Rashi

- Rashi reasons that Moses' successor couldn't be a hothead.
- Rather the Israelites needed a leader /
- Who'd understand the diverse needs of the community and exude patience.
- Joshua was a man who listened and learned from others
- That's a big reason why he was chosen / as the next leader of the Jewish people

My First few Months

- That's what I want to do / in my first few months here.
 - I want to meet with as many congregants as possible over coffee / dinner / or on the tennis court.
-

Get to Know You

- I want to get to know you and I want to hear your ideas
About what we do well and what we can do better.
- And then / once I really know the community
- We can formulate a more detailed strategy – together //
on how we'll grow and adapt.

Consensus builder

- That's the way I operate,
- I'm very much a consensus builder / someone who believes in the power
of community.
- I think in 2018 / we can't take our synagogue for granted.
and that's why it's my 4th big rock
(restate) 1) Torah, 2) Avodah, 3) Gemilut Chasadim and 4) sacred community

Rick Jacobs

- Rabbi Rick Jacobs / the head of the Reform movement
- Recently wrote a great article on the 4 major strategic goals
that every synagogue must focus on.
- He said that building sacred community must become the 4th principle
(big rock) / that every synagogue commits itself too.

Sacred Communities

- B/c sacred communities don't magically appear.
- A sacred community can't be taken for granted

Instagram

- The reason things are changing /
- Is that we're part of the Instagram generation.
- B/c for millions of people
- Instagram / Facebook / Snapchat/ has become the community / in which they
interact the most.
and that's b/c Instagram and Facebook (for older people)
- Have become a virtual community.
- B/c building a real community is hard -- it takes sweat equity

Synagogue Important

- While many prefer that virtual world /
- We can't forget that the synagogue community is still vital.

- B/c there are very few places in American society
Where people: young/old / rich/poor / Republicans/Democrats
come together (and of course at Kol Shalom -- everyone gets along 😊)

Navy Football

- Also, you don't say to someone
- Hey we both have season tickets to Navy football games //
You got to help me in my time of need.
- What the synagogue does is create sacred relationships.
Between Jews at any age or stage of life
- We help each other // b/c we are connected by our love of -- God / Torah /
Social Action

We matter

- I know I'm speaking to the choir
- Still, I want more people to realize / that Kol Shalom matters
b/c it binds us to the Jewish tradition and each other
- At 1909 Hidden Meadow Lane:
- We teach our children -- Jewish values
- When you're sick / we'll pray for you (Mishaberach) and the Chesed
Committee will bring you Shabbat dinner
- When you're grieving // we'll come to the shiva house to comfort you
- If you're celebrating a Bar/Bat Mitzvah // we'll throw candy at you /
in a loving way (no lawsuits please!)
- B/c we're bound together.

My experience

- I experienced this firsthand,
 - a) Jaime Adkins gave us a list of services we could use in the area /
 - b) Judy Salob and Hannah Kaufman brought us dinner.
 - c) Ari Tannenbaum spent hours setting up my computer.

Continue to build

- As I begin here at Kol Shalom,
- I ask that we work together to build our synagogue /
- B/c it will deepen our souls / it will make us menches.

How to do it?

- Still, you might say Rabbi / it's nice that you talked about community and its importance.
But how do you actually cultivate sacred community?

YK Forum

- At my synagogue in Altoona / we had a program called The YK Forum
- People shared the stories of their Jewish Journey
- You got to know your friends and fellow congregants on a deeper level
- We learn through stories (give examples from the Forum)

Sum up: Joshua

- To sum it up / this week Joshua is appointed as the new leader of the Jewish people in the bible / and of Congregation Kol Shalom
- If you read the Book of Joshua
- What's the first thing he tells the people to do / once they cross into the land of Israel?

Big Rocks

- In chapter 4 / he tells the Israelite leaders:
- I want you to carry 12 Big rocks / from the middle of the Jordan river and place them in the Land of Israel /
 - 1) As a sign of the miracles / that God performed for you
 - 2) As a sign of the importance of the covenant / that you established with Adonai.

Joshua's first act

- The first thing Joshua does in this new land of Israel /
- Is to tell the people / they need to put down their big rocks so that they'll always remember / the most important principles in the Jewish tradition

Conclusion

- So, as I begin as the new Rabbi at Kol Shalom
- I too hope / that we can secure the 4 big rocks
- That have been and will continue to be / the foundation of Kol Shalom:
 - 1) Torah
 - 2) Avodah (service to God)

- 3) Gemilut Chasidim (act of loving-kindness)
- 4) The cultivation of sacred community.
And I pray that just as Joshua / followed a great leader in Moses
but succeeded in his own way
- That I too will be blessed / as the new Rabbi at Kol Shalom.

Shabbat Shalom